

1653

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THE

Lord Bishop of WORCESTER'S

SERMON

Before the RIGHT HONOURABLE

House of LORDS,

On Thursday, November 29, 1759.

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Die Lunæ 3 Decem. 1759.

Ordered,

BY the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby, given to the Lord Bishop of *Worcester*, for the Sermon by him preached before this House on *Thursday* last, in the Abby-Church, *Westminster*; and he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

Ashley Cowper, Cler. Parliamentor.



A
S E R M O N

Preached before the Right Honourable the
LORDS SPIRITUAL and TEMPORAL
in Parliament assembled,

IN THE
Abby-Church, *Westminster*,

On *Thursday*, November 29, 1759,

BEING THE
Day appointed to be observed as a Day of
GENERAL THANKSGIVING to Almighty God
for the signal SUCCESSES with which his
Majesty's Arms have been blessed.

Johnson BY
JAMES, Lord Bishop of WORCESTER.

L O N D O N:
Printed for G. HAWKINS, at *Milton's Head*, Fleet-Street.
M.DCC.LIX.

S E R M O N

Preached before the Right Honourable the

Lords Spiritual and Temporal

in Parliament assembled

At St. Pauls Church

On Thursday the 14th of May 1704

By James Lowndes

L O N D O N

Printed for C. Hurd at the Bible and Sun in Pall Mall

DAN. II. 20.

*Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever :
for wisdom and might are his.*

THE prophet Daniel, upon a view that was given him by the Almighty of the great revolutions that were to happen in the kingdoms of the earth, breaks forth into this strain of thanksgiving—*Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever : for wisdom and might are his.*

And shall we upon experience of the many signal, and repeated Mercies which this Nation has received at the hand of God, not lift up our voice of praise and thanksgiving to the Most High, who ruleth in the kingdoms of men*, and divideth to nations their inheritance†.

* Dan. iv. 32.

† Deut. xxxii. 8.

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We are here assembled to shew our just sense of these Mercies; which must depend upon the truth and effect of our notions of the government of a Being of infinite Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, who holds, disposes, and controlls all things.

If we are fully and vitally influenced by this persuasion, we shall make a proper application of it to our own breasts upon every important occasion.

Every part of the creation has the mark of God's power impressed upon it, and bears evident testimony to it. War itself is an acknowledgment of the power of God; as it is an appeal to him for a decision of the rights of nations, which have no superior upon earth to whom they can make appeal. His hand directs the events of battles, and the revolutions of empires—and vain are the efforts of man to oppose, or obstruct the course of his

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Providence. *He doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none may stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou * ?*

As his power is unlimited, the methods by which it is administered are various, and all conspire to the illustration of his greatness, and to the advancement of the general happiness of mankind ; however his purposes, in the execution of them, may surpass the reach of our comprehension.

The most memorable and decisive events recorded in history, have seldom answered the previous determinations of human prudence.

Unforeseen circumstances give a different turn and direction to the best formed plan of operations—I returned, saith the wise man, and saw under the sun, that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong †.

* Dan. iv. 35.

† Eccl. ix. 11.

It is God that giveth the Victory.

Fleets and armies are but the instruments of his Providence. And *that* Power, which can set bounds to the boisterous element, and say unto it, *hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be staid* *—can most certainly controul any enterprize, the success of which must in a great measure depend upon that very element.

Thus in the days of our forefathers did God disperse a terrible fleet, the threat and preparation of many years: And perhaps for that very reason, because it vainly boasted itself *invincible*. The word of the Lord went forth, and the storms and tempests were ready to fulfil it, and to scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

The same Providence, propitious to the liberties, and the happy constitution of this

* Job xxxviii. 11.

Country,

Country, in the next century, gave a prosperous course, to a fleet set out, for the deliverance of these Kingdoms from arbitrary power, superstition, and slavery.

May we in the present important crisis, which must fill every heart with the most anxious expectation, experience the same favourable interposition of the Almighty. *His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save—neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear* *.

Every age can supply us with instances of the Divine Power, exerted in an extraordinary manner, as so many public monuments, to convince the profligate, upon whom the more silent evidences of that Power have no influence.

Upon these occasions, second causes are over-ruled, and important events brought about, which no human foresight could have

* If. lix. 1.

discerned, which no counsel of man could have devised.

All history is full of examples of this truth, the Jewish in particular. And though that people was under a *particular* Providence, and a *peculiar* Administration; yet, if *that* method of God's proceeding with the Jews, as a nation, had not been founded in reason and justice, it could never have been established by a God of Truth and Righteousness. And therefore, examples from that history, so far from losing any part of their force, upon account of a particular Providence, are, upon *that very* account, of greater weight and authority.

We may observe, throughout their whole history, that whenever they acted in obedience to God, the weakest instruments prevailed—whenever they were disobedient or rebellious, they were defeated by *men*, every way inferior to them, in force, in number, in military skill.

skill. Their national glory and reputation *always* sunk as their idolatry and irreligion prevailed, and *revived* by their repentance and reformation.

*Is not this great Babylon, that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty *? was the proud vaunt of Nebuchadnezzar. —But while the word was in his mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, The kingdom is departed from thee.*

Instances of this kind, in the Gospel, are more private and familiar—The presumptuous rich man, who thought he had goods laid up in store for many years, and was enlarging his barns for their reception, was soon fatally convinced of his error, in placing his dependance upon his wealth and power—That night *his soul was required of him †.*

• Dan. ii. 30.

† Luke xii. 20.

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These unhappy consequences of security and confidence (which, in some degree, will affect every individual, and every nation, under the same circumstances) must remind *us*, for whose admonition these things are recorded, *not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly**.—They will shew us in the *strongest* light, *where, and where only*, our true dependance lies; not in human power, not in numerous fleets and armies, however well appointed, but in the superior protection and assistance of the Almighty.—*God is our hope and strength, therefore shall we not be afraid*†.

We have happily experienced his protecting power and goodness, in such a series of Mercies, so *quickly* succeeding each other, as is hardly to be paralleled in any history.—But Mercies lose their effect, if they direct not our thoughts to the Hand from which they came.

* Rom. xii. 3.

† Ps. xlv. 1, 2.

A *devout and grateful mind* recollects, and dwells upon them with satisfaction and delight—And while it pays the debt of gratitude, renews and quickens the enjoyment of the Blessings themselves, by frequent reflection, and constant acknowledgments: Sensible of its own weakness and insufficiency, it looks up to the Father of Mercies with humility and thankfulness—It considers extraordinary favours as the kindest admonitions, and encouragement to extraordinary gratitude and obedience.—The tribute of praise and thanksgiving is the *least* return we can make. And though our praises and thanksgivings cannot add any thing to *his* Glory, who sitteth on his throne in the highest heavens; yet, as they are the natural means of shewing our gratitude, of acknowledging our dependance, they are well-pleasing in the sight of God, who *accepteth according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not* *.

* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

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Gratitude

Gratitude to benefactors is *indeed* a duty acknowledged by all the world. And he must be entirely void of every virtue, who is not disposed to make suitable returns, or proper acknowledgments for favours received.—But public and national benefits require from us a more solemn sacrifice. The mere formality of a Thanksgiving can never satisfy our obligation in this point. They require the substantial returns of public virtue and national piety.

Blessings bestowed upon societies of men, not only claim our acknowledgments to God, but call for a *particular* exercise of our social virtues.—They remind us *strongly* of our duty to our fellow-creatures, and exhort us to imitate, as far as lies in our power, *that goodness* for which we praise the Lord; by communicating and diffusing our happiness; by administering to the necessities of the poor, and to the comfort of the afflicted.—That we may
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be perfect, as our Father which in heaven is perfect*.

The exercise of *this* virtue, in general, is enjoined to us by our Saviour, with a more than common earnestness. And it seems in a peculiar manner to be expected from us, when our hearts are enlarged with the sense of benefits received, and when the extraordinary motives to gratitude and affection are most strongly impressed upon us.—*If God hath so loved us, ought not we also to love one another †?*

The love of God, and the love of man, are so closely connected together, that the one is a proof and a test of the other. We have no means of shewing our love to God so effectually, as by shewing it, where he has directed us to shew it, to our distressed neighbour.

* Mat. v. 48.

† Joh. iv. 11.

Success, if not rightly improved, may, in its consequences, be hurtful. If it turns men's minds from religious reflection—If it fills them with flattering objects, and makes them less attentive to the consideration of the great purposes of God's Providence, and to the salutary ends of its dispensation—If it makes us appropriate to *ourselves* the favour of God, as the reward of our *own* merits—If it gives occasion to intemperate excesses, to riot and debauchery; or to unwarrantable and presumptuous expectations for the future, we may have reason to repine at our prosperity, and the public may feel the unhappy effects of it.

The very instability of human affairs may, to a wise man, give occasion to apprehension, rather than confidence. All the operations of war particularly, however well concerted, are liable to the greatest uncertainty in the execution. And neither past or present successes can insure to us the like advantages for the future.

ture. We may have yet great dangers to encounter ; and should endeavour, by a right use of the Mercies which we have received, to prevent those miseries and calamities, which, should they come upon us, might overwhelm us. If we examine our own hearts, we may have reason rather to apprehend the severity and judgments of God, than to expect a continuance of the Mercies we have lately experienced. And, if the Lord should turn away his face from us, and withdraw the light of his countenance, what support could we have ? It is therefore of the utmost consequence to us upon every consideration, to prepare and to guard our minds against the ill consequences of prosperity. It is a part of the religious duty of this day. And nothing can more contribute to this good purpose, than a serious attention to the words of the prophet, *that wisdom and might are of God.*

They are *inherently* and *essentially* his. And whatever degrees of *these* are given to *man*,
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they flow from that great Fountain of Light and Beneficence; and are intended to be subservient to his glory.

The most important use of them, is to discover to us the knowledge of God, and the several manifestations of his will, and to animate us to such a lively faith in him, and such an active obedience to his precepts, as may conciliate his favour and loving kindness. God's grace and assistance is not promised but to the endeavours of men. It co-operates with them in every good purpose, and every virtuous undertaking. And as our wisdom and power will most certainly be defeated, if we entirely rely upon them, and leave the Providence of God out of the question: So, if we rely upon Providence, without exerting those talents which God has graciously entrusted to us, all our hopes will be ineffectual.—It is therefore our duty to labour after the attainment of such *wisdom* as is agreeable to our own nature, and to the will of God;
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and to exert such might as our natural abilities, situation, circumstances, and condition of life, afford; always remembering that the Lord is King. Every one's own conscience must dictate to him the proper application of the talent committed to his trust. Every one must feel his own powers, and every one must answer for the neglect or abuse of them.

This principle, and the obligation we lie under of making this improvement, applied to every one's own heart, will extend to all ranks and conditions of life. Power, thus employed, as it is the consequence of virtue, and connected with it, is the natural means of happiness, and becomes a common blessing. Mankind looks up to it with reverence, and obeys it with satisfaction.

Even Power *Almighty*, according to our *best* idea of it, is originally founded, and continually exercised in beneficence. The end
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of God's moral government is universal happiness, and his laws are the laws of truth and righteousness.

A steady obedience to these laws has been found by the experience of all nations, and all ages, to be the most effectual means of securing to us the favour of the Lord of Hosts, the God of Battle ; and of giving us repeated occasions of commemorating the Mercies of God, and of shewing forth his salvation from day to day.

While we offer up our most solemn thanks to God, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh ; while we praise him for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doth for the children of men ; it will become us to pay our subordinate acknowledgments of duty and affection to him, whom God has made the chosen instrument of his Providence to these kingdoms. May that God, *whose Providence he devoutly adores in these*

these his dispensations, give him a further increase of glory, and happiness, by fresh advantages over his enemies ; and, in his own good time, crown these important successes in war, and *complete this happiness*, by making him the instrument of securing and establishing to us the solid and substantial blessings of peace. And may the happiness we enjoy by his government, be perpetuated to us, under his Family, to the latest Posterity ! The happiness which we enjoy is great.—Success abroad, though the most striking, is not the most important part of it.

If we consider the miserable and desolate condition of those countries, which have been the more immediate seats of war ; the various scenes of distress, which will occur to our thoughts, upon *this reflection*, will shew us the happiness of our own situation, who, in many respects, have enjoyed, amidst the calamities of war, the most valuable blessings of peace.—And while a spirit of uncommon

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zeal,

zeal, and unanimity, the best foundation of national strength, thus animates a free people; and men of all conditions vye with each other in marks of inviolable attachment to their Sovereign, and in a common concern for the public prosperity and welfare, what may we not hope in so just and righteous a cause?

Let it be our endeavour, as it is our duty, to make a right use of the Blessings we enjoy; and by an uniform obedience to God's laws, and by the practice of universal righteousness, so essential to the happiness of *any country*, to engage still further the peculiar protection of heaven—Let us exert those powers which God has given us, as our respective situations shall enable us, to *his honour*, and the *common* benefit of our fellow-creatures. Renouncing any vain confidence in our own arms, or in our own wisdom, and receiving any unmerited success from the hand of God, with the devout spirit and acknowledge-

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knowledgment of the Psalmist, *Not unto us,
O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give
the glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's
sake* *.

* Pf. cxv. 1.

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knowledge of the Trinity, let me say
O Lord, our Father, but who say more
the glory for thy name, and for thy
name.



